

# **Masterpieces & Curiosities: Diane Arbus's Jewish Giant**

**Opens April 11, 2014**

## **Second Offering in New Exhibition Series Exploring Works from the Jewish Museum**

New York, NY – *Masterpieces & Curiosities: Diane Arbus's Jewish Giant* continues a new series of exhibitions focused on individual works in the Jewish Museum's world-renowned collection. On view from April 11 to August 3, 2014, this exhibition focuses on Diane Arbus's *A Jewish giant at home with his parents, in the Bronx, N.Y., 1970*, using ephemera, sound recordings, and family photos to provide an intimate look into one of Arbus's most recognized yet least understood subjects.

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In 1959 the photographer Diane Arbus (1923–1971) visited Hubert's Dime Museum and Flea Circus, a Times Square basement phantasmagoria. One of its main attractions was Eddie Carmel, a man who supposedly stood over nine feet tall, billed as "The World's Tallest Man." In April 1970, a year before her death, Arbus visited him at the home he shared with his parents, and shot her iconic portrait. Carmel was the son of immigrants from Tel Aviv. He had lived a normal life in mid-century New York until age fifteen, when he began to suffer from acromegaly, a hormonal condition causing extreme growth. He soon needed custom-made clothing, and was unable to finish college or pursue a typical career because he realized that people could not look beyond his physical appearance. Feeling like a social outcast, he embraced a life in show business, celebrating and even exaggerating the feature that made him unique. *A Jewish giant at home with his parents, in the Bronx, N.Y., 1970* shows an ailing Eddie, age 34, struggling to stand upright just two years before his death.

Photographs and ephemera on view chronicling Eddie Carmel's life and career include family snapshots from the 1940s, a pair of his custom-made size 24 shoes, an example of the oversized rings sold at his sideshow performances, and a novelty album Carmel recorded as part of his efforts to find greater fame. The exhibition also features works from the Jewish Museum's collection depicting the biblical giant Goliath and the Jewish legendary figure of the Golem; a selection of memorabilia of two famous giants from popular culture, the Incredible Hulk and the wrestler Andre the Giant; as well as a photograph by Lisette Model – one of Arbus's influences and teachers – depicting the gender-bending performer Albert-Alberta, who appeared alongside Eddie Carmel at Hubert's Dime Museum and Flea Circus.

Diane Arbus's photographs often explore the tension between normalcy and aberrance. In *A Jewish giant at home with his parents, in the Bronx, N.Y., 1970*, she touches on the popular obsession with superhuman height – a recurrent theme in folklore and popular culture. Her image and its mesmerizing subject may be seen in both historical and metaphorical terms. Artists and audiences have long marveled at any

deviation from a supposed norm, but the allure of the extraordinary is deeply intertwined with unease about the human body, its unpredictable abnormalities, and their attendant difficulties. In this way, gigantism and its mythology offer lessons about the infinite range of human experience, poignantly emphasized by Arbus's photograph.

Over the course of the seven exhibitions in the *Masterpieces & Curiosities* series, which runs from 2013 to 2017, the Jewish Museum's curators are exploring objects that highlight the breadth and diversity of the collection, ranging from an iconic Alfred Stieglitz photograph, to a Moroccan wedding costume, and a painting of a Passover seder by Carnegie Prize-winner Nicole Eisenman. These intimate exhibitions provide new insights into works from the Museum's collection – contextualizing, examining, and rethinking the piece on view by surrounding it with other artworks, documents, and source materials.

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The *Masterpieces & Curiosities* series was organized by Jens Hoffmann, Deputy Director, Exhibitions and Public Programs. *Masterpieces & Curiosities: Diane Arbus's Jewish Giant* is curated by Daniel S. Palmer, Leon Levy Assistant Curator.

#### **About the Jewish Museum**

Located on Museum Mile at Fifth Avenue and 92nd Street, the Jewish Museum is one of the world's preeminent institutions devoted to exploring art and Jewish culture from ancient to contemporary, offering intellectually engaging, educational, and provocative exhibitions and programs for people of all ages and backgrounds. The Museum was established in 1904, when Judge Mayer Sulzberger donated 26 ceremonial objects to The Jewish Theological Seminary as the core of a museum collection. Today, the Museum maintains a collection of over 30,000 works of art, artifacts, and broadcast media reflecting global Jewish identity, and presents a diverse schedule of internationally acclaimed temporary exhibitions.

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The Jewish Museum is located at 1109 Fifth Avenue at 92<sup>nd</sup> Street, New York City. Museum hours are Saturday, Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday, 11am to 5:45pm; Thursday, 11am to 8pm; and Friday, 11am to 4pm. Jewish Museum admission is \$15.00 for adults, \$12.00 for senior citizens, \$7.50 for students, free for visitors 18 and under and Jewish Museum members. Admission is Pay What You Wish on Thursdays from 5pm to 8pm and free on Saturdays. For information on the Jewish Museum, the public may call 212.423.3200 or visit the website at [TheJewishMuseum.org](http://TheJewishMuseum.org).

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